



News Release

For immediate release: December 3, 2009

(09-191)

Contacts: [Judy Bardin](#), Environmental Epidemiology
[Gordon MacCracken](#), Communications Office

360-236-3193
360-236-2074

Winter fires may be cozy, but pollutants in smoke can damage health

Check air quality before planning strenuous outdoor activities

OLYMPIA — When winter weather rolls around, people like to spend time indoors with family and friends. Frequently, that means enjoying a fire in the home fireplace — but the smoke from that fire may be a health hazard for some people.

Winter is also the home heating season. Often, November through January bring winter weather patterns that cause stagnant air. At these times, air pollution — especially from wood stoves and fireplaces — is trapped near the ground, where it collects. Smoke contains fine particles and gases that can be breathed deep into the lungs. Such pollutants can threaten the health of people with heart disease, asthma, and lung diseases, as well as children and older adults.

Breathing polluted air can cause short and long-term health problems. People with heart and lung diseases may have symptoms sooner than healthy adults. Older adults often have unrecognized heart or lung disease that puts them at risk. Children spend more time outdoors, where they can breathe air pollution. Children's lungs are more easily damaged because they're still developing.

When people are active, they breathe more deeply and more often, which increases the amount of air pollution they breathe in. The level of air pollution that causes health problems is different for each person. For some, a simple activity such as walking the dog may cause difficulty while others may not be affected until they do heavier activity like yard work or running.

Often air pollution can't be seen or smelled, so it's hard to judge air pollution levels. Be sure to check air quality before taking part in outdoor activities, especially if you're in a high-risk group.

Learn more about how [air quality conditions can affect your health](#)

(<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/smokefactsheet.pdf>) and what to take into account when you [plan outdoor activities](#) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/oehas/pubs/outdoorair.pdf>).

— More —

Information on [air quality conditions](https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/enviwa/Default.htm) (<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/enviwa/Default.htm>) can be found on the state Department of Ecology Web site or online at one of [seven local clean air agencies](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/local.html) (<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/local.html>). Updates on air quality are available by subscribing to the American Lung Association of Washington [“Breathe Easy Network”](http://www.alaw.org/air_quality/e-forecast_service) (www.alaw.org/air_quality/e-forecast_service). Color-coded information on these sites lists air quality in different zones going from good (green) to hazardous (maroon). Plan outdoor activities for days when air quality is in the “good” or green zone.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
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